



**AUSTRALIAN CHRISTIAN CHURCHES (ACC)
INCLUDING HILLSONG CHURCH,
INSTITUTIONAL REPORTING TO THE
NATIONAL OFFICE FOR CHILD SAFETY,
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES.
DECEMBER 2020.**

SECTION 1: **IDENTIFYING THE INSTITUTION**

AUSTRALIAN CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

PO Box 8093
Norwest NSW 2153

www.acc.org.au

Structure and Governance:

Australian Christian Churches (ACC) is a national association of Pentecostal churches in voluntary cooperation (Cooperative Fellowship), on terms of equality, uniting for evangelism, fellowship, order, discipline and other purposes. Each individual church is self-governing, however commits itself to work together with other churches in the movement for the purpose of mutual support and the spread of the gospel in Australia and the world.

The overarching governing document of the ACC Movement is the United Constitution¹.

Australian Christian Churches is a recognised denomination under the Marriage Act 1961.

SECTION 2: **GENERAL REPORTING AGAINST RECOMMENDATIONS RELEVANT TO ALL INSTITUTIONS**

Theme 1: Making institutions child safe

Measure 1.1: New or revised Code of Conduct, policies and procedures for child safe institutions.

(Volumes 6, 7) (Recommendations 6.4-6.6, 7.8)

- All staff and volunteers comply with a Code of Conduct that sets behavioural standards towards children, explains reporting requirements and handling complaints of child sexual abuse;
- Requires all people working within the institution to undergo initial and periodic training of the Code of Conduct, and
- Ongoing documentation of policies and procedures related to child safe standards.

¹ ACC United Constitution

Description of measures implemented prior to December 2018:

ACC developed the ACC Child Protection Policy² in conjunction with the Australian Childhood Foundation (<https://www.childhood.org.au/>) and it was unanimously accepted at the 2015 ACC National Conference, ACC's supreme governing body, with an implementation date of 1st December 2015. The overall strategy towards ongoing child protection was termed ACC Safer Churches. Further implementation Guidelines³ were developed in the lead up to the implementation date.

The Policy requires all ACC Credential and Certificate holders to complete Safer Churches training every three years. ACC requires that all ACC people who have a direct role with children, as defined by the policy, receive adequate training at a minimum every three years (ACC Safer Churches Guideline 1⁴). Safer Churches Induction training includes behavioural standards, reporting requirements and complaints handling.

Safer Churches Induction training is a six hour face-to-face workshop, or equivalent online training option (see [link](#)). This workshop has been developed by Safe Ministry Resources (SMR) for ACC. SMR is a company independent of ACC which specialises in providing child protection resources. A separate ACC Safer Churches Refresher course has also been developed in conjunction with SMR, for those who have previously completed the Induction course (see [link](#)).

Statistics re training prior to December 2018 were:

- *10,276 ACC People and Credential holders have completed Safer Churches Induction training face-to-face 2015-2018*
- *944 ACC People and Credential holders have completed Safer Churches Induction training online since its launch in October 2017*
- *56 ACC People and Credential holders have completed the Safer Churches Refresher course online since its launch in October 2018*

In November 2017, ACC launched an ACC Safer Churches Volunteer Workshop for church volunteers. Prior to December 2018:

- *The ACC in Victoria trained 188 local church presenters*
- *The ACC in NSW trained 12 local church presenters*
- *1494 ACC volunteers completed this workshop*

ACC has two Codes of Conduct:

- *ACC Ministerial Code of Conduct⁵*
- *ACC Volunteer Church Workers Code of Conduct⁶*

At the 2015 National Conference, changes were voted in to the ACC Ministerial Code of Conduct to include wording specifically related to the handling of notifications of sexual abuse, as per:

² ACC Child Protection Policy, April 2015

³ ACC Safer Churches Guidelines, 2015

⁴ ACC Safer Churches Guideline, 2017

⁵ ACC Ministerial Code of Conduct, April 2015

⁶ ACC Volunteer Church Workers Code of Conduct

'Apart from strict adherence to all policies and procedures adopted by the ACC, a Minister who has been notified of an instance of sexual abuse must not engage in poor administrative practices, which include, but are not limited to:

- 1) Failure to take any action that should reasonably have been taken;*
- 2) Failure to notify the relevant State President, their appointee or other relevant officer;*
- 3) Failure to follow an appropriate consultative process;*
- 4) Excessive or unreasonable delay in process;*
- 5) Inadequate record-keeping;'*

Description of measures implemented since December 2018:

In conjunction with Safe Ministry Resources, ACC continued to review and update the Safer Churches Induction and Refresher training to reflect ongoing legislative changes and good practice. These training options continued to be available to ACC Credential and Certificate holders, as well as ACC people. As reflected in the ACC Child Protection Policy and Guidelines, training is required to be updated every three years. In 2019, together with Safe Ministry Resources, the ACC Safer Churches Volunteer Workshop was developed as an online course for all ACC people who do not hold an ACC Credential, or need to complete the Safer Churches Induction as a requirement of their role, giving immediate access to training to all ACC volunteers.

*Since December 2018 **3877** ACC people, Chaplains and Credential Holders have completed or refreshed their Safer Churches training. **1975** have undertaken training since last report.*

Prospective work that will be undertaken post-2020 to implement this measure:

In 2021 ACC have plans to:

- Develop a paid church workers' Code of Conduct and Declaration for those people who are in a paid church work position, but do not hold an ACC Credential.*
- Further review the 2015 Child Protection Policy as part of ongoing improvement in line with Child Safe Standard 9.*
- Update all current training workshops to reflect legislative changes and best practice*

Measure 1.2: Improvements to institutional responding and reporting

(Volume 7) (Recommendation 7.7 and 7.8)

- There is an effective complaint handling policy and procedure in place that sets out how the institutions should respond to complaints of child sexual abuse, and is understood by children, staff, volunteers and families.
- If a complaint is made, there is a risk assessment framework followed immediately and appropriate discipline of any internal perpetrators or decision-making of staff on allegations undergoing investigation.

ACC has clear procedural process for responding to complaints including the ACC Safer Churches Guidelines 8 and 11 and the ACC Safer Churches Helpline Process Flow Chart⁷.

In, 2020 ACC in conjunction with Safe Ministry Resources has worked to update Guideline 8 to reflect a child focused complaint handling response.

The ACC Safer Churches Workshop Induction and ACC Safer Churches Volunteer Workshop provides training in complaints handling and response.

The ACC has a national Safer Churches Helpline 1800 number where ACC Churches and people can report concerns. This helpline is managed by an independent organisation SMR, provides local churches and individuals a place to report that is not internal, it also provides pastoral and risk management advice in relation to child protection issues.

ACC also has a Safer Churches information poster⁸, so children and families know who their local Safer Churches person is, as well as how to contact the ACC Safer Churches Helpline should they wish to do so.

Measure 1.3: Improvements to recordkeeping and information sharing

(Volume 8) (Recommendations 8.1 and 8.4)

- Institutions should implement the Royal Commission's principles for records and record keeping that responds to child sexual abuse occurring within institutions.

Included in the ACC Safer Churches Implementation resources is a "Record Keeping Procedure"⁹.

The ACC Safer Churches Manual (3rd Edition)¹⁰ and Online training points to this resource. This procedure is used in conjunction with ACC Guideline 8.

The ACC Safer Churches Implementation Resources includes reporting forms¹¹ that are available to all ACC churches to use for their records are available online through the ACC National website.

The Helpline Triage Report form provides a record keeping tool for the local church and the State executive. This form records information about statutory reporting and actions taken to care for the child and stakeholders.

In addition, all allegations are tabled at the State and National Executive (akin to Board) meetings and form part of the meeting records. SMR keeps records of all calls received through the Safer Churches Helpline.

ACC updated the Child Protection reporting form in 2020 to improve record keeping.

⁷ ACC Safer Churches Helpline Process Flow Chart

⁸ ACC Safer Churches PosterA3, 2017

⁹ ACC Safer Churches Implementation Resources SC024

¹⁰ ACC Safer Churches Manual 3rd Edition, page 36

¹¹ ACC Safer Churches Implementation Resources SC025

THEME 2: Children's Voices

Measure 2.1: Children participate in decisions that affect them

(All relevant volumes and recommendations)

- Information about how children are able to express their views and how their voices have been incorporated into child safe practices, including the design of policy and decision-making.

*ACC Safer Churches Guideline 5- Promoting Empowerment and Participation states, "ACC People and constituent churches **shall** actively promote the empowerment and participation of all people at church in the protection of Children and Young People." Included in the ACC Safer Churches Implementation Resources, which were developed to assist with Implementation of this Guideline in 2018, are the following:*

- *Participation and Inclusion of Children*
- *Feedback form for Children*
- *Feedback form for Parents and Carers¹²*

These resources are available to all ACC Churches via the ACC website.

The section relating to the Empowerment and Participation of children in ACC Safer Churches Manual Ed3¹³ has been redrafted to better reflect the 10 National Child Safe Principles.

In November 2019 an update was made to Guideline 8 to reflect the importance of a child focused response to complaints handling. Two (2) sentences were added which stated: "ACC constituent churches complaint-handling process shall follow State and Territory Legislation. Response processes shall be child focussed and uphold the rights of children and young people in line with Child Safe Standards."

This will sit alongside the fact sheet that provides information that refers to the NOCS complaints handling process, so our churches understand what is meant by a 'child focused response'.

ACC at its National Conference in May 2019 children and young people were involved in a forum to give voice to their views around child safe practice and complaints handling, as well engaging them in their ideas for resources that would assist them to know how to get help and who to talk to, should they need to.

On an ongoing basis, practical strategies and resources to assist local churches find ways to allow children to participate in decisions that affect them, will be developed and communicated through the State Executives, via the Safer Churches Implementation Resources and through ACC Kids and Youth Alive.

¹² ACC Safer Churches Implementation Resources SC016, SC017, SC018

¹³ ACC Safer Churches Manual 3rd Edition, pages 14-17

ACC has also developed a Safety poster for children outlining what they can expect from their church based on the Standards poster from the Australian Childhood Foundation¹⁴.

- In 2021 ACC will develop infographics for Children and Young People as well as Parents and Carers outlining our Child Protection Policy and the standards they can expect from their church, including how to report a concern.

SECTION 3:

REPORTING AGAINST INSTITUTION SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

All religious institutions (*Volume 16, recommendations 16.31 – 16.58*)

Description of measures implemented up to and since December 2018:

Recommendation 16.31 All institutions that provide activities or services of any kind, under the auspices of a particular religious denomination or faith, through which adults have contact with children, should implement the 10 Child Safe Standards identified by the Royal Commission.

ACC is committed to implementing the 10 Child Safe Principles agreed to by all States and Territories in response to the Recommendations of the Royal Commission. These principles are included in ACC Safer Churches Induction, 3rd Edition¹⁵, training manual and online training.

In 2021 ACC plans to:

- *Update the training materials, particularly as legislation is introduced in each State and Territory requiring an audit of child safe standards within the organisation.*

Recommendation 16.32 Religious organisations should adopt the Royal Commission's 10 Child Safe Standards as nationally mandated standards for each of their affiliated institutions.

As a Movement of separately incorporated and governed autonomously churches, ACC's powers to 'mandate' directives are limited. The ACC has unanimously adopted a Child Protection Policy, which in turn either needs to be adopted by the appropriate governance model in each local church or used as a minimum standard for their own policy.

This policy includes the establishment of Child Protection Guidelines known as the ACC Safer Churches Guidelines which are part of the minimum standards for ACC Churches. These guidelines are reviewed regularly as part of Child Safe Standard 9.

¹⁴ <https://professionals.childhood.org.au/app/uploads/2018/08/ACF354-SGC-Standards-Poster-1-8419.pdf>

¹⁵ ACC Safer Churches Manual 3rd Edition, page 4

The ACC Safer Churches training is available to all ACC Credential and Certificate holders and people. The acceptance of each individual church's CPP is confirmed via an annual declaration.

There have been only a small number of examples of churches who are unable and/or unwilling to implement a CPP. In these cases, after much assistance offered, we have removed the Certificate of Fellowship from these churches, meaning they are no longer an ACC church. For the safety of children in the church, we would much rather work with them to see a CPP adopted and implemented, but as expressed earlier we have no legal basis to enforce this.

In 2021 ACC will be updating Guideline 8 to provide additional procedures to respond to self-harm

Recommendation 16.33 Religious organisations should drive a consistent approach to the implementation of the Royal Commission's 10 Child Safe Standards in each of their affiliated institutions.

ACC Safer Churches Child Protection Policy, Safer Churches Guidelines, Safer Churches Implementation Resources and Training address this recommendation. All Safer Churches resources (including policies, procedures, guidelines, links to training etc) are available to our pastors and churches through a single online portal.

Recommendation 16.34 Religious organisations should work closely with relevant state and territory oversight bodies to support the implementation of and compliance with the Royal Commission's 10 Child Safe Standards in each of their affiliated institutions.

ACC is committed to working closely with relevant State and Territory oversight bodies to support the implementation of, and compliance with the 10 Child Safe Principles ratified by the States and Territories in response the Royal Commission recommendations.

During 2020, ACC worked with the Office of the Children's Guardian in NSW as they developed a Guide to the Child Safe Standards for Faith Based Organisations.

Recommendation 16.35 Religious institutions in highly regulated sectors, such as schools and out-of-home care service providers, should report their compliance with the Royal Commission's 10 Child Safe Standards, as monitored by the relevant sector regulator, to the religious organisation to which they are affiliated.

Not applicable

Recommendation 16.36 Consistent with Child Safe Standard 1, each religious institution in Australia should ensure that its religious leaders are provided with leadership training both pre- and post-appointment, including in relation to the promotion of child safety.

Refer Measure 1.1.

Recommendation 16.37 Consistent with Child Safe Standard 1, leaders of religious institutions should ensure that there are mechanisms through which they receive advice from individuals with relevant professional expertise on all matters relating to child sexual abuse and child safety. This should include in relation to prevention, policies and procedures and complaint handling. These mechanisms should facilitate advice from people with a variety of professional backgrounds and include lay men and women.

ACC is committed to working with all State and Territory Governments and other organisations that may provide expert advice as outlined in the recommendation above. In 2019, the ACC National and NSW Safer Churches Directors attended the National Council of Churches Safer Churches Conference in Brisbane. This professional development included the following:

Keynotes:

- **Child-Safe Churches: A transformative culture**
Prof Daryl Higgins, Australian Catholic University, Institute of Child Protection Studies
- **Listening to the voices of children**
Prof Tim Moore, University of South Australia, Australian Centre for Child Protection
- **Understanding the Impact of Institutional Betrayal and Spiritual Abuse on Survivors**
Julie Blyth, Clinical Consultant, Survivors and Mates Support Network (SAMSN) and Craig Hughes-Cashmore, Chief Executive Officer SAMSN
- **Transforming Cultures: Trauma Informed Practice**
Dr Cathy Kezelman AM, President, Blue Knot Foundation National Centre of Excellence for Complex Trauma
- **National Office for Child Safety**
Kathryn Mandla, Head National Office for Child Safety

Panels:

- **Panel 1: Child-Safe Churches: A transformative culture and Listening to the voices of children**
Panel members: Prof Daryl Higgins and Prof Tim Moore, Lynette Drew and Prof Peter Sherlock.
- **Panel 2: Understanding the Impact of Institutional Betrayal and Spiritual Abuse on Survivors and Trauma Informed Practice**
Panel members: Julie Blyth, Craig Hughes-Cashmore, Dr Cathy Kezelman AM, Rev Catherine Wynn Jones, Dr Graham Barker, Scott Holmes and Caroline Carroll OAM
- **Panel 3: What is the Church's imperative/mandate to safeguard vulnerable people, particularly the aging and those with disabilities?**
Panel members: Rev Andy Calder, Janette Phelan, Ilsa Hampton, Dr Jeffrey Chan and Lucy Davis

A summary of this conference has been reported to our National Executive.

ACC has an ongoing relationship with SMR, who provides expertise in the area of child protection.

ACC participates in the NSW Professional Standards Network (cross denominational network)

ACC participated in the NSW Ombudsman Faith Group Standing committee in 2019.

Recommendation 16.38 Consistent with Child Safe Standard 1, each religious institution should ensure that religious leaders are accountable to an appropriate authority or body, such as a board of management or council, for the decisions they make with respect to child safety.

The ACC United Constitution and the ACC Ministerial Code of Conduct sets out requirements of accountability for ACC Credential and Certificate holders.¹⁶

Recommendation 16.39 Consistent with Child Safe Standard 1, each religious institution should have a policy relating to the management of actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may arise in relation to allegations of child sexual abuse. The policy should cover all individuals who have a role in responding to complaints of child sexual abuse.

*ACC approved a "Conflict of Interest" Guideline¹⁷ in April 2015. The independently run Safer Churches Helpline 1800 number also helps to ensure that any potential conflicts are appropriately managed. ACC Safer Churches Guideline 8 provides a national standard reporting procedure. ACC Safer Churches Guideline 11 states, "When responding to allegations of misconduct and/or abuse by those who are not ACC Credential or Certificate holders, ACC People **shall** work through an appropriate process which affords natural justice to all parties" A process of natural justice by definition requires that conflicts of interest be addressed and that the process is conducted without bias.*

At the 2015 National Conference, the ACC Ministerial Code of Conduct was adjusted to include the following wording which specifically addresses the above recommendation, i.e.; 'Ministers must consider their other duties, such as their duty of confidentiality, and the duty to avoid conflicts of interest in discharging their duties to adequately respond to reported instances of sexual abuse.'

Recommendation 16.40 Consistent with Child Safe Standard 2, wherever a religious institution has children in its care, those children should be provided with age-appropriate prevention education that aims to increase their knowledge of child sexual abuse and build practical skills to assist in strengthening self-protective skills and strategies. Prevention education in religious institutions should specifically address the power and status of people in religious ministry and educate children that no one has a right to invade their privacy and make them feel unsafe.

ACC participated in the NSW Ombudsman's project with EY to produce the Faith Groups Child Safe Standards resource.

ACC provides links to a range of prevention education resources including Bravehearts, the Office of eSafety, the NSW Office of the Children's Guardian and the Australian Childhood Foundation.

¹⁶ ACC United Constitution, May 2017, Article 11

¹⁷ ACC Conflict of Interest Guideline, April 2015

Recommendation 16.41 Consistent with Child Safe Standard 3, each religious institution should make provision for family and community involvement by publishing all policies relevant to child safety on its website, providing opportunities for comment on its approach to child safety, and seeking periodic feedback about the effectiveness of its approach to child safety.

ACC churches can publish child protection policy and procedures on their church websites and can provide their people with the information regarding who is their local Safer Churches person/ team, as well as the contact number for the ACC Safer Churches helpline.

It is proposed that ACC continue to develop resources that can be used by local churches that communicate the ongoing commitment to child safety and provide information about feedback opportunities.

Included in the ACC Safer Churches Implementation resources are feedback forms for both children and parents.¹⁸

In 2021, ACC will provide churches with infographics about our Child Protection Policy in developmentally appropriate language for children, young people and parents/carers.

Recommendation 16.42 Consistent with Child Safe Standard 5, each religious institution should require that candidates for religious ministry undergo external psychological testing, including psychosexual assessment, for the purposes of determining their suitability to be a person in religious ministry and to undertake work involving children.

ACC continues to investigate a workable solution for this recommendation given the autonomous nature of constituent churches as the employers of the Credential Holder

Recommendation 16.43 Each religious institution should ensure that candidates for religious ministry undertake minimum training on child safety and related matters, including training that: a. equips candidates with an understanding of the Royal Commission's 10 Child Safe Standards b. educates candidates on: i. professional responsibility and boundaries, ethics in ministry and child safety ii. policies regarding appropriate responses to allegations or complaints of child sexual abuse, and how to implement these policies iii. how to work with children, including childhood development iv. identifying and understanding the nature, indicators and impacts of child sexual abuse.

See Measure 1.1.

Recommendation 16.44 Consistent with Child Safe Standard 5, each religious institution should ensure that all people in religious or pastoral ministry, including religious leaders, are subject to effective management and oversight and undertake annual performance appraisals.

¹⁸ ACC Safer Churches Implementation resources SC017, SC018

ACC Safer Churches Guidelines 9 and 10 outline the need for adequate induction, supervision, and ministry review. Every ACC credential holder is subject to Movement oversight via the ACC Ministerial Code of Conduct and Grievance Procedure¹⁹, as well as annual/biennial declarations.

Recommendation 16.45 Consistent with Child Safe Standard 5, each religious institution should ensure that all people in religious or pastoral ministry, including religious leaders, have professional supervision with a trained professional or pastoral supervisor who has a degree of independence from the institution within which the person is in ministry.

ACC is still addressing this recommendation. Chaplaincy Australia (a ministry of ACC) have partnered with St Marks National Theological Centre to teach a Professional Supervision course that is available to all ACC Credential and Certificate holders as well as ACC people in ministry. It is anticipated that this course will be one of the tools used to address supervision of credential holders.

Close to 15 ACC credential holders have now completed the Graduate Certificate of Professional Supervision through St Marks National Theological Centre and are accredited Supervisors with the Australasian Association of Supervision (AAOS). There have also been sessions at our State Conferences promoting and encouraging ACC credential holders to have regular professional supervision or mentoring through a professional, properly trained and independent person.

During 2020, ACC NSW provided a free supervision session for Credential Holders.

Currently, 'junior' pastors minister under the supervision of a Senior Pastor or the relevant State Executive.

ACC Safer Churches Guideline 10 addresses supervision of church workers.

Recommendation 16.46 Religious institutions which receive people from overseas to work in religious or pastoral ministry, or otherwise within their institution, should have targeted programs for the screening, initial training and professional supervision and development of those people. These programs should include material covering professional responsibility and boundaries, ethics in ministry and child safety.

The ACC Child Protection Policy and Procedures are binding for ACC Constituent Churches and clearly state the requirement for ACC Churches to comply with relevant State and Territory Laws around screening and reporting, as well as following ACC Guideline 1 regarding adequate training. There are screening processes in place to ensure the proper visas are in place for people wishing to apply for an ACC credential. Additionally, any credential applicant that comes from another denomination overseas, must provide a letter of recommendation/reference from that denomination.

Recommendation 16.47 Consistent with Child Safe Standard 7, each religious institution should require that all people in religious or pastoral ministry, including religious leaders,

¹⁹ ACC Grievance Procedure for Certificate Holders 2017

undertake regular training on the institution's child safe policies and procedures. They should also be provided with opportunities for external training on best practice approaches to child safety.

ACC Safer Churches training (face to face and online) address this recommendation as outlined in ACC Safer Churches Guideline 1.

ACC training is developed in conjunction with SMR, a company external to ACC.

ACC NSW has provided all constituent churches the information and links to the Office of the Children's Guardian training in regard to the Reportable Conduct Scheme when it was introduced in 2020.

Recommendation 16.48 Religious institutions which have a rite of religious confession for children should implement a policy that requires the rite only be conducted in an open space within the clear line of sight of another adult. The policy should specify that, if another adult is not available, the rite of religious confession for the child should not be performed.

This is not applicable to ACC Churches, however, both ACC Safer Churches Guidelines 4 and 15 refer to appropriate boundaries in this regard.

Recommendation 16.49 Codes of conduct in religious institutions should explicitly and equally apply to people in religious ministry and to lay people.

ACC has both a Ministerial Code of Conduct and Volunteer Church Worker Code of Conduct.

In 2021, ACC will work with SMR to develop a Code of Conduct and Declaration for paid church workers who do not hold an ACC credential or certificate.

These are referenced in ACC Safer Churches Guidelines 3 and 10 and included in the Safer Churches Induction and Volunteer training.

Recommendation 16.50 Consistent with Child Safe Standard 7, each religious institution should require all people in religious ministry, leaders, members of boards, councils and other governing bodies, employees, relevant contractors and volunteers to undergo initial and periodic training on its code of conduct. This training should include: a. what kinds of allegations or complaints relating to child sexual abuse should be reported and to whom b. identifying inappropriate behaviour which may be a precursor to abuse, including grooming c. recognising physical and behavioural indicators of child sexual abuse d. that all complaints relating to child sexual abuse must be taken seriously, regardless of the perceived severity of the behaviour.

ACC Safer Churches Guidelines 1, 6, 7 and 8 as well as the ACC Safer Churches Induction and ACC Safer Churches Volunteer workshop address this recommendation.

Recommendation 16.51 All religious institutions' complaint handling policies should require that, upon receiving a complaint of child sexual abuse, an initial risk assessment is conducted to identify and **minimise any risks to children**.

ACC Safer Churches Guideline 8 provides procedure to address this recommendation.

*In November 2019 an update was made to Guideline 8 to reflect the importance of a child focused response to complaints handling. Two (2) sentences were added which stated: "ACC constituent churches complaint-handling process **shall** follow State and Territory Legislation. It is recommended that response processes are child focussed and uphold the rights of children and young people in line with Child Safe Standards."*

This will sit alongside the fact sheet that provides information that refers to the NOCS complaints handling process, so our churches understand what is meant by a 'child focused response'.

In 2021 ACC will be updating Guideline 8 to provide additional procedures to respond to self-harm

Recommendation 16.52 All religious institutions' complaint handling policies should require that, if a complaint of child sexual abuse against a person in religious ministry is plausible, and there is a risk that person may come into contact with children in the course of their ministry, the person be stood down from ministry while the complaint is investigated.

ACC Safer Churches Guideline 8 provides procedure to address this recommendation.

Recommendation 16.53 The standard of proof that a religious institution should apply when deciding whether a complaint of child sexual abuse has been substantiated is the balance of probabilities, having regard to the principles in *Briginshaw v Briginshaw*.

*The ACC National Grievance Procedure applies the principles in *Briginshaw v Briginshaw* in determining the standard of proof. In NSW, Victoria and the ACT, where Reportable Conduct legislation has been introduced or announced, local churches must apply the standard of burden of proof, set out in *Briginshaw v Briginshaw*.*

Recommendation 16.54 Religious institutions should apply the same standards for investigating complaints of child sexual abuse whether or not the subject of the complaint is a person in religious ministry.

ACC requires that ACC Child Protection Policy be implemented by constituent churches, including Guidelines for reporting- Guidelines 8, 11, 15²⁰.

²⁰ ACC Safer Churches Guidelines, Aug 2017

ACC has established a national helpline to assist churches to follow required procedures.

Allegations made against an ACC Credential or Certificate Holder must be handled by the appropriate State Executive using the ACC Grievance Procedure, alongside relevant State Laws for reporting.

In those States and Territories where Reportable Conduct Schemes apply, ACC Churches need to comply with this legislation.

Recommendation 16.55 Any person in religious ministry who is the subject of a complaint of child sexual abuse which is substantiated on the balance of probabilities, having regard to the principles in *Briginshaw v Briginshaw*, or who is convicted of an offence relating to child sexual abuse, should be permanently removed from ministry. Religious institutions should also take all necessary steps to effectively prohibit the person from in any way holding himself or herself out as being a person with religious authority.

The ACC Ministerial Code of Conduct and Grievance Procedure outlines the discipline procedure for ACC Credential and Certificate holders. An adverse finding regarding child sexual abuse would result in the withdrawal of an ACC Credential or Certificate.

A number of articles²¹ have been written to our Movement from our National President regarding the proper use of the term Pastor, being only for those who hold an ACC Credential/Certificate (and who subsequently have completed the requisite checks and training). This message has been reinforced verbally at our State and National Conferences.

Recommendation 16.56 Any person in religious ministry who is convicted of an offence relating to child sexual abuse should: a. in the case of Catholic priests and religious, be dismissed from the priesthood and/or dispensed from his or her vows as a religious b. in the case of Anglican clergy, be deposed from holy orders c. in the case of Uniting Church ministers, have his or her recognition as a minister withdrawn d. in the case of an ordained person in any other religious denomination that has a concept of ordination, holy orders and/or vows, be dismissed, deposed or otherwise effectively have their religious status removed.

The ACC Ministerial Code of Conduct and Grievance Procedure outlines the discipline procedure for ACC Credential and Certificate holders. If an ACC Credential or Certificate Holder is convicted of child sexual abuse, they would immediately lose their Credential/Certificate.

Recommendation 16.57 Where a religious institution becomes aware that any person attending any of its religious services or activities is the subject of a substantiated complaint of child sexual abuse, or has been convicted of an offence relating to child sexual abuse, the religious institution should: a. assess the level of risk posed to children by that perpetrator's ongoing involvement in the religious community b. take appropriate steps to manage that risk.

²¹ ACC Articles regarding use of term 'Pastor'

ACC has a "Known Offender Guideline"²² which addresses this recommendation.

ACC church boards can seek external advice regarding these matters, and this is clearly recommended in the Known Offender Guideline.

Recommendation 16.58 Each religious organisation should consider establishing a national register which records limited but sufficient information to assist affiliated institutions identify and respond to any risks to children that may be posed by people in religious or pastoral ministry.

The autonomous nature of ACC constituent churches places the management of known offenders on local church boards. The ACC Known Offender Guideline recommends that local churches report to their local church Insurers. ACC has suggested to local churches who have a known offender who moves to another ACC church that appropriate disclosure be made to the leadership of that local church under qualified privilege for public safety reasons (NSW Supreme Court. Haddon v Forsyth. 2011).

Additional supporting documentation information relating specifically to Hillsong Church's response to the Royal Commission's Recommendations, can be located in Section 4

Note: All documents referred to in the main body and footnotes section of this document have been attached previously to the 2018 and 2019 Australian Christian Churches (ACC) and Hillsong Church Institutional Report to the National Office for Child Safety, Department of Social Services. As there has been no changes to any of these documents mentioned they have purposely not been attached to this report again. If you wish to review these documents, please refer to the 2019 Reporting or contact our ACC National office.

²² ACC Known Offender Guideline, Aug 2017